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Centro de Estudios Avanzados en Ciencias Sociales (CEACS)

**Juan March Institute**

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Author(s): Pérez Díaz, Víctor

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FROM PEASANTS TO FARMERS:  
A POST-SCRIPTUM TO STRUCTURE AND  
CHANGE OF CASTILIAN PEASANT  
COMMUNITIES

Víctor Pérez-Díaz

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Víctor Pérez-Díaz is the Director of the *Center for Advanced Study in the Social Sciences* of the Juan March Institute in Madrid.

## 1. Into the European Common Market

During the seventies and eighties the transformation of Castilian peasant communities, and in general of Spanish peasantry, has proceeded along the lines of a previous discussion I have referred to in my book *Structure and Change in Castilian Peasant Communities: An Inquiry into Rural Castile 1550-1990*\*. Historical experience already has shaped the institutional relations between peasants and the state, interest associations and the market; now the traditions already established have been adjusted to the new circumstances, an ever increasing involvement in markets, and a liberal democracy. In the process of facing up to the new challenges, and revising these traditions, peasants have become “farmers,” thus making not so much for an altogether new social group, but rather for a new avatar or transformation<sup>1</sup> of the peasant world. The purpose of this paper is to explore some of the adaptive mechanisms of a significant segment of the peasant population, the one which has been referred to, in a still recent past, as the middle peasants. I will look into the ways these peasants have engaged in economic strategies, dealt with a new political class and set up new interest associations. Lastly, I will discuss the way in which they are experimenting with new understandings of their situation, as well as with a new social identity which is being tried against the background of a cultural tradition organised around the core ethics of the *labrador honrado* (See chapter V of my *Structure and Change of Castilian Peasant Communities*).

In little less than one generation, farmers, and rural life, have undergone radical change. This change is even greater than any which took place during the course of previous centuries. The suppression of tithes and of the manorial system took place in the first three decades of the XIX<sup>th</sup> century. The process of disentanglement of the land had roots in the XVIII<sup>th</sup> century, but its full development extended from the 1830's on to the end of the century. These changes dismantled the social structure of the old regime which had been in place for at least three centuries, devised a new map for rural ownership to last for several generations, up to now, and expanded agricultural output, although they hardly altered the technological system.

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\* New York, Garland Publ. Co., 1991 (forthcoming).

The age of the railways, roughly from 1860 to the end of the XIX<sup>th</sup> century, changed the structure of the markets for agrarian products, and in not much more than twenty or thirty years it redrew the cultivation map in the form in which it has reached our own time. The institutional transformations of the Spanish state during the XIX<sup>th</sup> century created the conditions for a redefinition of local politics and links between the villages and the central political power. In turn, these arrangements were challenged by the processes of sociopolitical mobilization in the countryside, conservative in the northern plateau, anarchistic in Southern Spain (with a brief, but perhaps decisive, socialist contribution at the end), which, during the first third of the XX<sup>th</sup> century, set the scenario of political and cultural tensions which resulted in the Civil War.

However, all these changes in the structure of ownership and local power, means of transportation and agrarian markets, political culture and political organization, did *not* alter most of the customary equilibria between a market-oriented and a subsistence-oriented economy, as well as the peasants' reliance on traditional technology. Rural migration to the cities during the sixties, together with the expansion of demand created the conditions for the massive diffusion of technology in the agrarian scene, and this in turn made farming into something totally dependent on a market of tractors, fuel, fertilizer, animal foodstuffs, and seeds. Beyond a certain point, peasants found themselves producing everything, or almost everything, for the market; domestic consumption by the family, or re-use, became a relatively marginal phenomenon; and the rate of introduction of novelties (techniques of production, accounting and commercialization, as well as new crops) accelerated considerably.

An inflection point in the introduction of changes was reached by Spanish agriculture as a whole around the 1960's and 1970's, and it continues until now. When this point was reached, agriculture went into an accelerated phase of transformation, and it lost in a few decades more than half of its manpower; it became populated instead by machinery. At the same time, its people, and its people's customs, have become, in the eyes of many, "modern" or "capitalist": "farmers" rather than "peasants." But once this has happened, these farmers have had

to face up to those problems common to modern farmers: problems of cost control, the dimensions of farms, and market regulations (both for produce and for production factors).

In global terms, Spanish agriculture has grown in a ner-vertiginous way during the last twenty to thirty years. The total surface under cultivation has hardly changed, but irrigation tripled in the 1960's and 1970's, and it reached about 2.7 million hectares in 1977. It has produced much more in real terms than in the past, and for many years the rate of growth of final agricultural production has been greater than in any other European country. If we give an index figure of 100 for 1969/71, then in 1977 Spain had an index of 127, France 109, Italy 104.<sup>2</sup> (And agrarian income per person active in agriculture grew in the period of 1986 to 1990 at an annual rate of 5.3% in Spain, and at a rate of 1.4 in the group called C-10, that is, in the rest of the European Community excepting Spain and Portugal). This production has been achieved with a much smaller working agricultural population, which in fact fell from 4.8 million people in 1960 (42% of all active population), to 4 million in 1964 (34%), 3.5 million in 1970 (28%), 2.7 million in 1976 (20%), 2 million in 1982 (15%), and 1.6 million in 1989 (11%). That output has been achieved by means of machinery which multiplied tenfold just between 1960 and 1977. The new Spanish agriculture has been producing for domestic and external (above all European) demand which has been, at least until now, in full expansion.

These farmers' experience has been one of quite successful adaptation to the new circumstances, and particularly to the challenges posed by rural migration and expansion of demand, since the problems in Spanish agriculture in recent years have derived as much from demand as they did from supply. Demand has developed with the greater consumption of meat and milk, fruits and vegetables, reflecting the known tendency towards the alteration of the structure of food consumption as a result of increases in income levels.<sup>3</sup> Supply has tried to follow demand through the expansion of irrigation areas, intensification of production, changes in crops and animal species. Therefore, farmers' expenses for their operations have had to absorb ever increasing costs, of various types, starting with the wagebill, although this has been felt less and less over time due to the massive replacement of labour by machinery. This

machinery, plus energy expenses, seeds and animal foodstuffs (largely imported) meant growing operational costs. One way of reducing this growth in costs has been to widen the scope of the operation. But the land market has functioned in such a way that available land has been scarce, and prices extremely high. The capital market, which could provide credit for investment in land, has been overloaded by the effort to capitalize agriculture, thus contributing to its indebtedness (which is not alarming when compared with other European countries, but which constantly increasing). The solution of renting has been made difficult, because of a law that protects tenant-farmers.

Faced with the difficulty of improving results through reducing costs, farmers have tended to opt for a strategy of increasing produce, as well as prices. And, for a long time agricultural policies have encouraged farmers in this direction.<sup>4</sup> However, this direction has increasingly came up against two limitations. In the first place, a limitation in the future expansion of demand, since, by increasing the supply indefinitely, the risk is incurred of producing gluts, which no market, home or export, is going to be able to absorb. In the second place there is a limitation in the increase in prices, due to the government's vigilance of the alimentary component of consumer price indexes (which also reflects the resistance of other social groups).

Thus, farmers have thus been meeting ceilings of increasing inflexibility in the volume of sales and the constantly rising operational expenses, and the interest and amortization of tied-up capital. Their margin for manoeuvre to revise the scope of their operations has been limited, given land prices and the inflexibility of the rental system. Farmers, therefore, have managed to reach the status of modern agriculturalists, and this has been their great triumph, only to find that they now have to bear the burden, and share the fate, of so many modern European farmers, with their series of threats and spectres: reduction of profits and income from the land, debt, and the chorus of demands and complaints: claims for parity of incomes, and lastly for parity of status, and the regulation of the markets.

The farmers' general strategy for overcoming these challenges has been a complex one, which includes three dimensions: economic, political, and corporative (by means of interest associations). Their economic strategy has tried to achieve economic results by simultaneously attacking the double target of supply and demand, through the increase in production and the reduction of costs. At the same time, farmers pressure the state in order to increase or guarantee agrarian prices. The effort towards investment in land, irrigation, changes of crops and animal species, and machinery made by these farmers has been enormous. They have bought land from peasants who retired or left their farms, the result being a remarkable redistribution of land ownership in favour of mid-sized and big-sized farmers. Between 1962 and 1987, farms under 20 hectares decreased from 38% of the total arable land, to 26%; and farms between 20 and 50 hectares, from 22% to 18%. By contrast, farms of 100 hectares and more increased from 40% up to 53%.<sup>5</sup> Irrigated areas have expanded, such as, for instance, in Cuenca del Duero, where they doubled between 1970 and 1977, while the agricultural yields also doubled, both in dry and irrigation farming during this period.<sup>6</sup> There have also been important changes in crops and animal species. For instance, barley has replaced wheat (the area sown with barley increased from 1.7 million hectares in 1962 up to 4.7 million in 1987; by contrast, wheat cultivation fell from 4.2 down to 2.4 million hectares in the same period); sunflower oil has displaced olive oil, which has higher labor costs (the cultivation of sunflower went from a negligible surface area in 1962 up to 1 million hectares in 1987; while the area planted with olives went from 2.3 down to 0.8 million hectares); fruit trees and vegetables multiplied (as shown by the vertiginous agricultural growth of the province of Almería, whose agricultural income multiplied by fourteen between 1969 and 1979);<sup>7</sup> and pork meat replaced lamb meat much for the same reason (the number of sheep fell from 16.1 million to 12.7 between 1962 and 1987; while the number of pigs grew from 4.9 up to 19.8 million in the same period). Finally, the number of tractors increased from c. 130.000 in 1964 to c. 400.000 in 1976, and to c. 680.000 in 1987.<sup>8</sup>

## 2. Living in a liberal democracy

### 2.1. Interest Associations

Professional associations in the Spanish countryside have a long history. Rural workers' associations may be traced back to anarchist, and socialist, unions and organizations that emerged between the 1880's and the 1930's (with precedents in the XIX<sup>th</sup> century and earlier).<sup>9</sup> Most agriculturalists' or peasants' associations developed partly as a response to social unrest and the challenges those worker associations put on them and on their control of the labor markets, partly out of concern with the state's agrarian policies on prices and its (lack of) regulation of rural credit and capital markets in the countryside, and finally also as a result of the church's own strategy for a comeback in an increasingly secularized (and from the church's viewpoint, dangerous) world by the beginning of this century. From all this ensued a rich and complex tradition of Catholic agrarian associations, which developed during the first third of the XX<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>10</sup>

Although the marked contrast that existed, from the beginning, between Castilian peasants and Andalusian agriculturalists put some strain in their attempts to live together in the same organizations,<sup>11</sup> by the time of the Civil War most Catholic agrarian associations joined the nationalist cause with enthusiasm. But they did so, only to find themselves blocked in a power struggle with the *Falange* party which was eager to set up new agrarian associations under its control.<sup>12</sup> The net result was an accommodation of sorts. Catholic syndicates as such disappeared. But the same Catholic local leaders held most of the positions of power in the new local associations (called *Hermandades de Labradores y Ganaderos*) as well as in the 3 de 41el associations largely controlled by Catholic leaders remained practically untouched, such as the rural saving banks (*Cajas Rurales*) the rural cooperatives (*Cooperativas del Campo*), and most sectorial organizations. So that for the next thirty years the (Fascist) National-Syndicalist



organization provided little more than the larger institutional framework for all these local, provincial, and sectorial associations.

In general terms, the Francoist state had little inclination to incentivate most civil associations. Nevertheless, it was within the tradition of that state to allow *de facto* autonomy for those associations that focused on what seemed to be strict professional concerns, that were filled up by “reliable” social classes such as middle classes and the peasantry, and, that as in the case of the latter, could be easily put under some (usually light) supervision by equally reliable notables, churchmen and even the Falange party if need be. Moreover, some policies initiated by the Ministry of Agriculture encouraged specific forms of association in the countryside, such as the cooperatives for agrarian production in the early sixties.

The authoritarian state allowed, therefore, a limited development of the peasants’ associative powers, though it placed them in a political situation which was subordinate and deferential. By contrast, liberal democracy radically changed the rules of the game for the farmers’ collective action, in two ways. In the first place, democracy created both an institutional framework and a sociopolitical climate that encouraged the growth of fully autonomous agricultural organizations. In very few years, several farmers’ organizations came to the fore at the national level, and they fought for the control of the remnants of the Francoist organizations, reaching out to local and sectorial associations. At present, these associations still have a low membership, and they are divided. All the same, they are there, and are on the road to succeeding in the articulation of farmers’ demands in a coordinated fashion, both before the Spanish government and before the European community. What is more, they are having some effect. In the second place, liberal democracy also changed the rules of the game for interest groups by establishing a system of mutual exchanges between the state and the political class on the one hand, and those agricultural associations on the other. This could strengthen the latter’s capacity to represent and shape the demands of the farming population.

The new associations have been the result of a dramatic process of conflicts and understandings engaged in by the new state and the political parties of the Right, Center and Left of the political spectrum, as well as by the church and the old organizations from the Francoist period. This helps to explain some of their variations in ideological discourse, programs, and organizational features, as well as political alliances.

In the center-to-right part of the spectrum, we find three agrarian associations: the CNAG (*Confederación Nacional de Agricultores y Ganaderos*) the CNJA (*Centro Nacional de Jóvenes Agricultores*) and the UFADE (*Unión Federal de Agricultores de España*). They have come together in 1989 in the ASAJA (*Asociación Agraria de Jóvenes Agricultores*).<sup>13</sup> They did not occupy center stage at the beginning of the democratic transition, but in time they have proved to develop strength and representativeness. The CNAG was, from the beginning, the vehicle of Andalusian entrepreneurs. They faced local conditions in Andalusia that helped to moderate their stance. They were dependent on a labor market where masses of poor landless workers could compensate for their economic weakness via militant labor unions and political clout. Unions such as *Comisiones Obreras* and *Sindicato de Obreros del Campo* were relatively well organized, intensely vocal, and able to establish some emotional and symbolic links with the living memories of Anarcho-syndicalist struggles in Low Andalusia. At the same time, the Left was clearly the dominant factor in regional politics, at a time when, given the quasi-federal character of the new Spanish constitution, regional politics was expected to count more and more in the implementation, and even design, of agrarian policy. Hence, the leaders of CNAG took a rather accommodating stance towards the regional government and the regional scene. At the national level, however, after a few years, they tended to share the ambivalence of the larger business organization they belonged to, the CEOE (*Confederación Española de Organizaciones Empresariales*) towards the center government and its party, the UCD (*Unión de Centro Democrático*), and they tended to lean toward a more rightist party, the AP (*Alianza Popular*, later to become PP: *Partido Popular*). In turn, the center government encouraged a new organization, the UFADE (*Unión de Federaciones Agrarias de España*) which took root particularly (but not only) in the Castilian countryside. This different social base reflected

the different traditions of Castilian and Andalusian agriculturalists) UFADE (and also CNAG, for that matter) coexisted rather peacefully, for several years, with another organization created by and for the young agriculturalists, the CNJA. The church and the influence of Catholic culture had a hand in helping to set up these organizations: the CNJA, for instance, was influenced by the example of the French *Jeunes Agriculteurs*, an organization that Catholic activists started, and in which they have been playing a very important role.<sup>14</sup> In the end, by 1989, all these organizations came together under the common roof of ASAJA, partly because the logic of the situation for all agrarian organizations, as I will later explain, pushed them in this direction, and partly because their underlying political differences had become of minor importance.

Belonging to an ill-defined left-wing political culture, stood the COAG (*Coordinadora de Agricultores y Ganaderos*), and, in a second place, the FTT (*Federación de Trabajadores de la Tierra*). The COAG developed in the Ebro Valley, and in León, among peasants who had to face unstable markets, or markets dominated by the quasi-monopolist position of a few transforming and conserving companies. These peasants were under the influence of leftist Catholics and churchmen, and leftist politicians.<sup>15</sup> The COAG gained visibility in the national arena very soon, as a result of a spectacular mobilization of agriculturalists (known as *la tractorada*, or the “tractorists’ movement”) at a critical moment in the process of democratic transition, in the spring of 1977. The growth of this movement was stimulated by the policy the center government engaged in between 1978 and 1981, which favored corporatist arrangements concerning, agrarian prices, and also other complementary measures which were inspired by the nationwide success of the “social pacts” policy:<sup>16</sup> a policy of “agrarian pacts” that, contrary to the COAG’s expectations, the socialists were going to repudiate once they came to power in 1982. Ambivalence between socialists and COAG was mutual anyway, since the PSOE (*Partido Socialista Obrero Español*) had its own sister organization to protect: the FTT. The latter had, in fact, a rather remarkable history behind it,<sup>17</sup> but it was seriously handicapped by the fact that it tried to encompass both farmers and rural workers, and it

took quite a few years for the organization to learn from experience, through the 1980's, that under present conditions the demands and interests of these two groups would best be served by two fully autonomous different associations, of which the UPA (*Unión de Pequeños Agricultores*) was supposed to represent small farmers.<sup>18</sup>

It is hard to evaluate the relative strength of all these associations. The only official and relatively unambiguous test we have are the national elections for representatives in the *Cámaras Agrarias* which were held in 1978. CNAG, UFADE and CNJA all together (the organizations associated with the "right") obtained 20% of the votes at the local level; COAG and FTT, 12.5%. "Independents," which probably means people who used to hold positions in the old *Hermandades* of the Francoist period, and therefore presumably closer to the Right, received two thirds of the vote. Results at the provincial level confirmed that the Right and the independents could, in most respects, be counted together, since the Right got control of 31 provincial chambers *versus* 6 of the Left.

But despite these quite diverse trajectories of the Spanish agrarian organizations, by the beginning of the 1990's, more than fifteen years after the first (and only) elections took place, things look somehow different. Though COAG and UPA (before, FTT), and ASAJA (before, CNAG, UFADE and CNJA) have different political and ideological inclinations, the fact that all of them are living in the same rather difficult and ever more complex environment is pulling them closer and closer to each other. This is the result of the combined pressures from below and from above. Pressures from below reflect these organizations' need to have as large a constituency as possible, at a time when they cannot count on the farmers willingness and readiness to join due to ideological reasons: both the traditional subcultures of the Left and the Right having weakened considerably. They have very few members: some semi-official estimates mention a rate of affiliation of about 15% of the agricultural population by the late 1980's, but even these estimates seem to include people who do not belong to the active agricultural population proper. According to another estimate of 1983, the rate of affiliation was of 8.3%,<sup>19</sup> and this is in fact one of the unspoken reasons why these organizations are not overeager to repeat the elections to the *Cámaras Agrarias* (the other one being their

uncertainties, and that of the socialist government itself, concerning the role these *Cámaras* are supposed to play). However, in order to attract members, they have to prove that they are efficacious when dealing with the administration and the European Community. And from these higher instances (as well as from the peer pressure of other European agrarian associations) come unequivocal pressures for these diverse organizations to speak with only one voice.

So we have a situation at and where both the “logic of representation” (of pressures from above) and the “logic of membership” (of pressures from below)<sup>20</sup> combine, so that diverse organizations, working in the same field of activities, to come together and look increasingly similar. Most of these organizations are in fact adopting an ever more similar ideological discourse, relying less and less on a language of “class,” which may alienate middle and big farmers, and more on a language common to the whole agricultural “profession.” They share the same foci for their collective action, namely, the Ministry of Agriculture in Madrid (and the corresponding agencies of the Autonomous Communities), and, increasingly so, Brussels. And they are taking, under different guises, a quite similar programmatic stand, fighting rearguard battles on agrarian prices, and concentrating more and more on issues of training, credit, direct subsidies, environment, and the whole agro-alimentarian system.

## 2.2. Politics

Farmers have been living under conditions of a liberal democracy for a decade and a half, since 1976. They have adjusted rather easily to them. Most rural landless workers have supported the parties of the Left, Socialists and Communists. Most peasants, both middle-holders and small-holders, have tended towards the parties of the Center and the Right, even though there are significant regional variations. Even so, and keeping with a well established peasant tradition of accommodation with the party-in-power or the government-to-be,

these farmers have made compatible their inclinations towards the Center and the Right with a *modus vivendi* with the Socialist government, from 1982 on.

Evidence of the center-right inclination of most agriculturalists comes from two surveys of 1983 sponsored by the CIS (*Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas*)<sup>21</sup> and the FIES Foundation (referred to here as the ESA-1983 survey).<sup>22</sup> The results of the CIS survey indicate that on a scale 1 to 10, from the extreme Left to the extreme Right, the average farmer (excluding wage-earners) stood at 5.9. The ESA-83 survey was based on a sample of 620 middle (and big) farmers of six prosperous agrarian regions all over Spain: in Cuenca del Duero (a subregion of Castile), Rioja/Navarre, Lérida, Levante, Low Andalusia, and Almería. On a scale of 1 to 7, the average farmer of the ESA-83 survey stood at 4.13. It is interesting to note that by comparison with the average French farmer in 1978 (4.52 on a scale of 1 to 7),<sup>23</sup> the Spanish farmer placed itself rather more to the center of the political-ideological spectrum. That inclination to the center seems corroborated by the position taken by the farmers of ESA-83 regarding the Francoist period, with 36% against, 31 in favour, and 22 choosing a rather ambiguous middle ground which could be interpreted as reluctantly exculpatory of that period (by saying that “Franco’s performance was mediocre but he avoided serious mistakes”).<sup>24</sup>

This selfplacement at the center-to-right of the ideological continuum seems to fit with the actual voting behaviour of this population, allowing for regional changes and some changes through the entire period. According to the ESA-83 survey, the vote for parties of the Center and the Right among middle farmers stood at 66% in 1979 (46% voted for UCD and 13% for AP, the rest going to other parties), and it still was 60% in 1982 (and at 80% in Cuenca del Duero), after the collapse of the UCD (33% of this vote went to AP, and 15% to CDS, *Centro Democrático Social*). The Left got 30% of the vote in 1979 (PSOE, 21%; and Communists 6%), and 38% in 1982 (PSOE, 32%; and Communists, 4%). These middle farmers’ vote of 1982 was almost identical to that of French farmers in 1981: 60% for the Right (32% for RPR and 28% for UDF), 32% for the Socialist Party, and 6% for the Communist Party.<sup>25</sup>

Within that range of center-to-right parties, there were significant regional differences (since in regions such as Catalonia and Navarre, for instance, farmers tended to identify more with regional or nationalist parties). The prevailing general vote of farmers for center-to-right parties failed in regions such as Andalusia, at least in Almería and Low Andalusia, where a majority voted for the Left (55% versus 43% in Low Andalusia, and 60% versus 40% in Almería).

It is hard to explain this regional variation by appeal to different economic interests and economic strategies *per se*, since neither the type of professional associations these farmers belong to, or the type of action those associations engage in, nor the definition of those interests and those strategies express such difference. Moreover, there is considerable consensus among all these farmers about the general outline for the organization of agrarian production nationwide, and about the type of government agrarian policies they would like to be implemented.

Therefore, the main reasons for those regional differences lie in cultural and political factors. First, the weight of the church and catholic culture seems to be lighter in Andalusia, and this may be correlated with a different voting pattern. In the ESA-83 survey we find a lower number of practising believers among farmers in Almería (34%) and Low Andalusia (28%) than among the rest, for instance, in Cuenca del Duero (85%); also a lower frequency of farmers who have ecclesiastics as relatives, and who had studied in religious schools in the Andalusian provinces (10 and 13% respectively), than, again, in Cuenca del Duero (48 and 34%). The second factor may be politics itself, insofar as regions differ among themselves regarding both traditions of local politics and patterns of relationships between the regions and the central government. Local politics in Castile tended to be controlled traditionally by the Right; and the relationship between Castile and the central government has usually been rather close, with people of the low orders or classes in the countryside taking advantage of this circumstance to have access to bureaucratic, military, professoral, legal or ecclesiastical positions. By contrast, Andalusian middle farmers might be reacting today to a long history of poor access to the central state (though this might not be the case for the big latifundists),<sup>26</sup>

as well to their present need for accommodation with regional and local governments which are firmly in the hands of the Left.

But it is remarkable that, while near 60% of Andalusian middle farmers voted left in 1982, and one third of the farmers in Levante and Rioja/Navarre did the same, around 20% of Castilian farmers of Cuenca del Duero voted Socialist too. That was far from being exceptional in the Castilian rural *milieu* at large. García Sanz's study of the vote of rural dwellers (living in *municipios* of less of 2,000 inhabitants) of the nine provinces of the Autonomous Community of Castilla-León, in 1982 and 1989, shows that the PSOE obtains around 25/30% of the vote in the Eastern provinces (in 1989: Palencia, 33%; Burgos, 30%; Segovia, 28%; Avila, 27%; Soria, 24%), while obtaining *circa* 40% in the Western ones (in 1989: León, 44%; Salamanca, 42%; Valladolid, 38%; Zamora, 37%).<sup>27</sup>

So, after Franco's interregnum of near forty years, we find a rather complicated picture of the politics of Castilian peasants/farmers, in which the Left has managed to make a comeback to a position of significant strength. The differences with the past lie on the transformations that have taken place not only among these peasants, or farmers of today, but also on the character, ideas and policies of the Spanish Left. Today's Socialist Party has all but forgotten about the agrarian policies it defended in the 1930's, it is keen on getting the farmers' support (and in the late 1980's it seems the PSOE is counting on that for compensating for a gradual weakening of its more traditional urban constitutencies), and it puts pressure on the socialist agrarian union to avoid stressing the commonality of interests between workers and farmers, to mitigate the rhetoric of class conflict, and to forge an alliance between small and middle (and, by implication, big) farmers, in an attempt to strengthen the hand of Spanish agrarian professional associations within Europe.

In turn, while a majority of Castilian farmers feel closer to, and vote for, other parties (the AP, now PP, or the CDS) rather than for the PSOE, and while they keep on seeing with deeply rooted skepticism whatever policy any Ministry of Agriculture may engage in (and their criticisms on this score are very intense), these farmers, and the rural dwellers, of the Castilian



villages, take a favourable view of significant aspects of the socialists' general performance: by 1986, in a CIS survey among inhabitants of villages with population less of 2,000, there was a majority saying that the economy was in better shape after four years of socialist government, that Spain was "more modern," that the regional problem was getting closer to be solved, and that there was "more freedom" in the country.<sup>28</sup>

In sum, these Castilian farmers seem willing and ready to work out, and live by the terms of an accommodation with the socialists. That accommodation is, once again, and according with a well established tradition, contingent on the central state being responsive to farmers' demands, and giving them some measure of protection; on the state not siding with the rural workers against them, or otherwise giving in to radical demands for a type of agrarian reform that might challenge the fundamentals of the property system; on the state leaving room for the farmers' control over their own organizations, and to some extent on local power; and on the state respecting, or not interfering with, the farmers' own cultural traditions (or rather with the changes in these traditions the farmers have already accepted, or are on the process of accepting, on their own).

There is every indication that the position taken by these farmers as a whole, is rather sophisticated. If they show sympathy for the Right and understanding for the Left, they do so certainly not out of deference for either. The world of these Castilian farmers is not that of a collective prone to an attitude of deference, but rather of self-assertion (on this more later). Their approach to politics implies as a matter of fact, a significant degree of information about politics, and even of active participation in it.

The facts indicate a relatively high degree of what Barnes (and others) have called "conventional political participation."<sup>29</sup> By this it understood a relatively high frequency of reading about politics, talking about it, persuading friends to vote, working on a local problem, attending a political meeting, contacting politicians and working for a candidate or party. That this frequency is relatively high is demonstrated by comparing the average index of conventional participation, which results from combining all the replies on one scale from

1 to 8. In 1983 Spanish farmers had an average of 2.9, and Castilian farmers one of 3.3.<sup>30</sup> This is much higher than the figure for Spain as a whole both in 1980 (2.2) and 1978 (2.5), and even higher than general samples of the population of other Western European countries, such as the Netherlands (2.7), Great Britain and Italy (2.6).<sup>31</sup>

### 3. Constructing a new social identity: farmers as “professionals” rather than as “entrepreneurs”

#### 3.1. A plausible agrarian order: state, corporatism and markets

Castilian farmers, and Spanish farmers in general, whose economic performance during the last two to three decades has been, to a large degree, crowned by success, have now to adjust their production levels, reduce costs, and find their way through growing uncertainty, under the new conditions presided over by the transition to, and consolidation of, a liberal democracy. In such circumstances, these farmers have developed their powers of association and tentatively worked an accommodation with the new state and its political class, and diversified, and also qualified their support among the various segments of that class. In devising and implementing their economic, associative and political strategies, they have leaned back on a particular vision of a plausible agrarian order (plausible in the sense of been both desirable and feasible), which would be rooted in their own history and on the opportunities they perceive in present circumstances; and on a redefinition of their social identity.

Many of these farmers of today (themselves or their parents) are yesterday's peasants. By transforming themselves into farmers, in just one generation, and by having to deal with ever changing markets, growing demand, new technologies, modern accounting, interest associations, democratic politics and (to an extent) secularization, they have *not* become

*homini oeconomici* tout court. They are trying to put together the various fragments of their past and present experience by relying on unifying metaphors of their lives, their social identities and their social arrangements, which are not “markets,” nor even “business,” but rather “professions”; much in the same way as they envision a sort of agrarian order which is a hybrid of state and corporatism where markets do exist, but they are both limited and feared. Underlying that “professional” metaphor and this vision of an “agrarian order,” there is a claim for respectability and parity of status (and not only of parity of incomes) with the (broadly considered) “middle classes,” which is addressed to both the state and the Spanish society.

As for the models of organization of the agrarian economy that Spanish farmers may regard as desirable, three types could be noted: an administered economy, with the state playing the dominant part; a corporatist economy, on the basis of some understanding between the state and the farming profession; and a market economy. Naturally, elements of all three types may be expected to be present, but the question lies in determining the prevailing character of one or another, or some combination of them. We know that, in fact, the agricultural economy has depended, and it depends, greatly on the regulating (and purchasing) intervention of the state. Given the past history of this dependence, given present difficulties and given the foreseeable development of the associative potential of the farmers, the prevalence of some combination of the state and corporatist models could be expected.

At the same time, the type of social identity to be found among these farmers could, on principle, alternate between the model of the “agricultural entrepreneur” and another we may call the “professional farmer.” It may be imagined that at the end of a process of agricultural modernization, semitradeional peasants become “entrepreneurs” which, as such would (a) postulate a market economy, (b) identify themselves as businessmen, (c) focus their demands around a general demand for parity of income with other occupational categories, and (d) adjust their political preferences strictly according to their economic interests. But it may so happen that these farmers turn into “professional farmers” which, as such, would (a) postulate a regulated economy, or one with a mixed intervention of the state and the agricultural profession; (b) identify themselves as forming part of a “profession,” responding to a

particular calling, and with an emphasis on social service; (c) operate *vis à vis* the rest of society and the political class, not according to the strict logic of the demand for parity of income or earnings, but that of a demand, much wider, for parity of status; and (d) make their economic interests compatible with different political preferences, chosen, in the final instance, according to other criteria (including in the first place the criteria according to which they articulate their demands for status).

Now, let us look more closely at the main outlines of the plausible agrarian order (both desirable and feasible) the farmers envision. In the farmers' view the individual or family farm is the cornerstone of the agrarian order; that farm is seen, however, in the context, of a widely regulated market with state intervention, in some agreement with the farmers themselves rather than in the context of a free market. So, in the ESA-83 survey,<sup>32</sup> farmers were asked if they agreed with the following three phrases, each of which aims at a distinct model of the organization of the agrarian economy, on the basis of state intervention, or of a control of the economy by the state and professional associations, or of the free market. (However, let us bear in mind that the way the statements are phrased leaves room for people giving their assent to more than one of them; more in particular, the first two are not strictly incompatible if the government agency it refers to is supposed to be engaged in some bargain relationship with the professional associations). Here are the phrases and the responses: 64% of these farmers agreed with the statement: "All agricultural products without exception should be protected and controlled by a government agency, as is already happening with cereals and other produce." 71.8% agreed with the phrase: "Farmers' organizations should control many of the activities and initiatives which at the moment are controlled by the state." And finally only 35% agreed with the statement: "The best thing would be for every farmer to have the greatest degree of freedom of movement possible, with minimal control, whether from the state or from the farmers' own organizations."

The results bear out the impression, which could be deduced from other observations, of the dominant theme being that of some hybrid of state intervention and/or corporatism,

by corporatism meaning some significant degree of involvement of professional associations in the design and implementation of agrarian policies (and assuming that those organizations have a significant degree of representativeness of their own constituencies).<sup>33</sup> Yet, important regional differences regarding this topic should be noticed. While the rejection of a free market economy for the agrarian production is near unanimous in Cuenca del Duero, the farmers of Levante (and to a minor degree, of Lérida) lean precisely to the opposite direction, and seem more willing to accept a scenario with a minimum of state's and professional associations' intervention, as befits a farming population with a strong tradition of operations in the export market (and even despite the fact that they have developed local and sectorial organizations in support of those operations).<sup>34</sup>

This general tendency seems corroborated by the farmers' responses to questions about the "ideal pricing system" for the commercialization of their principal product, and comparing their responses with the real pricing system their principal products submit to. At the time, 56% of these farmers sold their principal product at prices either fixed (36%) or guaranteed (20%) by the state, with 36% selling them at market prices. But when asked about the "ideal situation," one region after another replied putting forward the ideal of price regulation (74%, and 83% in the case of the Castilian farmers), with only 12% marking their preference for a free market price (22% in Levante), although by comparison with the real situation, they increased considerably the relative importance given to guarantee prices (36%, up from 20% in real life) at the cost of fixed prices (remaining at a similar level: 38% in ideal terms, and 36% in real terms).

What we find here is a balancing act by farmers who alternate between two sets of ambivalences, vis a vis both the state and their professional associations. These farmers regarded the state as a final guarantee against a dangerous and unstable environment, but, at the same time, they harbored little confidence in the wisdom, the will and the capacity of that very state to solve their problems and meet their demands. And this, no matter which government they had to deal with, authoritarian or democratic, Right or Left. Their predecessors were critical of Franco's policies.<sup>35</sup> These farmers passed a harsh judgement

on the agrarian policies of the UCD government (of 1976/1982), 89% of them being critical of the lack of attention that government paid to agriculture. Besides, 62% considered that the policy of the Ministry of Agriculture during the last five years prior to 1983 on access to credit had been negative; 89% considered that the policy on fuels for use in agriculture had been negative; 78%, that the policy of farm prices negotiation had been negative; and 61%, that the policy of promotion of agricultural exports had been lacking. Regarding the general evaluation of the policy of the Ministry, on a scale from 0 to 10 points, it was awarded a value of 2.3. In these circumstances, when the farmers were asked if they expected future policy of the Socialist government to be better, or the same or worse than the previous one, 43% thought that it would be better, and 40% that it would be the same or worse. In time, this would mean that similar criticisms would be heard, later, from Spanish rural villagers with regard to the socialist agrarian policies.<sup>36</sup>

This explains why the all too easy conclusion of these farmers' support for state intervention, should be qualified by the hope these farmers place in the role to be played by agrarian associations, in the understanding, however, that this hope operates also only within certain limits.

First, there was hope in the role of agrarian cooperatives, to which 55% of those farmers belonged (72% of which claiming to be satisfied at the functioning of such cooperatives). These cooperatives are in the first place amongst those instruments which can be counted on in order to obtain better prices in the markets, and even to reduce costs (and their potential for development seems evident, with the one, and important reservation: the intrinsic difficulties, in leadership and organization, as well as difficulties of a technical and legal nature, for them to enter into the terrain of the processing of agricultural products).<sup>37</sup> Second, there was hope, also, in the professional associations mentioned above (see *supra* 2.1.). But here we are confronted with a new source of ambivalence, since we find that, on the one hand, membership figures in those organizations on the part of these middle farmers were relatively high (around 38%) when compared with the general rate of affiliation in the countryside (an estimate of at

most 15%: see *supra*), and that 67% held that consolidation of these associations was both urgent and necessary, while on the other hand, the opinions these farmers held about them were very critical: 66% considered them inefficient; 64% thought they were politically manipulated; and 52% lacked confidence in them.

In the final analysis, it seems as if both the state and the professional associations were both supported but not fully trusted by these farmers, and as if both the state and the professional associations were institutions they did not identify with in full, since any attachments would rest on an undercurrent of mixed feelings.

### 3.2. The Social Identity of the Farmers

The connection between the views farmers have of the agrarian order and of their own identity are linked to each other. As they need to work out again a special accommodation with the state in order to have some control of the different agrarian markets in which they are involved, and as they need to increase the level of their own technical training for handling agrarian operations, they search for a new identity fitting to those needs. Now they have to establish morally respected boundaries around their group, and to give some moral grounding to their claims. Being just an occupational category does not seem enough. By portraying themselves as “professionals,” farmers draw attention to the social service they fulfill, and to the special “credentials” they have. These credentials would be made out of a mixture of cultural traditions and technical expertise. This, in turn, would allow them to claim the type of moral authority on whose basis their claim for a control of the market could be grounded. This is why they are now trying to see themselves through the prism of the idea of “professions.” (Contrasting this process of professionalization of farmers with the emergence of professional authority in the past on the part of more traditional and well established professions would show some of the cultural and institutional limits for the success of the farmers’ strategy in this respect).<sup>38</sup>

The identity of the “entrepreneur” implies an activity normally directed to a market with limited state intervention, with the intention of achieving a profit on the basis of the optimisation in the use of various resources (land, capital and labor) and, by implication, an attitude which is instrumental and distanced, a utilitarian culture, with respect to these resources. The ideal type of “professional” implies very different characteristics. The professional defines himself, too, on the basis of an occupation and the control of some of the means of production, but these are to a significant extent of a symbolic and sociocultural nature (such as for instance the titles or credentials needed for exercising a trade). Although he is market-oriented, the professional depends to an important degree on the state, which regulates by means of laws the access to the profession, and therefore guarantees it a monopoly on the supply of professional services. In the process of dealing with the state (and getting this state qualification), professionals organize themselves corporatively, and attempt to control the market through agreements between their professional associations and the state. Professionals, normally, give prime importance in their motivations towards their professional activities to the value of honor or status, and not only (though obviously also) to monetary gain; and, in connection with this, they tend to define their activity as a response to a calling or vocation, and a service, rather than as a mere pursuit of their own particular interests.

There is every indication that the identity of the Spanish middle farmers we are referring to comes closer to the identity of the professional than to that of the entrepreneur. This may be demonstrated, and my argument made more persuasive, by putting together considerations concerning several interrelated topics: the value they put on their occupation, agriculture and the land, and in general the “agrarian philosophy” they hold; the value they attribute to technical knowledge and education, as well as on the modernization of both their farming and their houses; the meaning they attach to their activity, which is seen as a social service; their self-conscious attempt at the control of the recruitment into their occupation; the link they seem to establish between that idea of social service and that, sense of achievement, on the one hand, and the importance given to the prestige, honor, and status of the farming profession on the other; and the sense of self-esteem and self-assertion that comes out of the



view they have of the position they hold in society, out of their decisions to stay in the field, their villages and their occupations, and even out of the depth of their resentment to the low esteem they think they receive from the rest of society.

First, there was a clear attribution of a very high value to their occupation, namely, agriculture, and to the immediate object of their occupation, the land. They had what has been called an “agrarian philosophy.”<sup>39</sup> Agriculture was seen as the most basic occupation in society, and almost every other occupation would depend on it; so that a depression in agriculture was assumed to cause a depression in the entire economy: most farmers agreed with these statements, particularly in Castile<sup>40</sup> (though to somehow a minor extent than the farmers of Idaho and Wisconsin Carlson and McLeod referred to in their study).

This value was extended to the moral virtues of the countryside and rural life, as opposed to the moral inferiority of the city. Here we find that these survivors of the crisis of the 1960's and 1970's, tended to reassert themselves and their way of life, and to distance themselves from the sense of inferiority their predecessors had in front of the city. The fact is that in the ESA-83 survey 77% of the farmers *disagreed* with the sentence: “the inhabitants of villages should follow the customs and the way of life of the city if they wish to prosper,” and by contrast 83% were *in agreement* with the phrase: “from the city should be taken that which is positive (advances, comforts, etc.), but the countryside should preserve its traditions and ways of thinking.” These indications of a positive reassessment of the countryside as opposed to city life are corroborated by responses given by a sample of Spanish rural dwellers to a CIS survey of 1983, to the effect that problems of street security, drugs, morals, cost of living, unemployment and food supply are harder to solve in the city than in the villages.<sup>41</sup>

Second, a high regard for technical knowledge and education combined with status motivation in modernising farm and housing. 72% of the farmers choose education as being the crucial factor in being able, in today's conditions, to reach a high position; and 75% considered that scientific research was of paramount value. This was not just a philosophical or abstract appreciation of the role of education: these farmers actually invested heavily in

their own education and that of their sons. While only 12% of the father of present-day farmers had anything more than primary education (and 11% were illiterate), 27% of the respondents had studied beyond primary level, with 9% having been to university (and only 1.4% were illiterate). (This percentage of studies beyond primary level is similar to that of French farmers with more than 50 hectares in 1967: 33%; and higher than the one of the English farmers in 1972: 18%).<sup>42</sup> But if the level of formal education had risen sharply by contrast with the previous generation, it will increase all the more with the next: at this moment 33% of the sons of the big farmers, and 20% of those in the middle band, were already, or planned to be, at university.

Formal schooling and technical training could be considered to be symbols of these farmers' capacity to adjust to modern conditions. Their big investments of time and money into modernizing both their farms and their houses were symbols of the same. As already indicated, both the farmers and their local communities had understood that buying a tractor was not only a useful thing to do from a merely instrumental or economic viewpoint, but also a way of asserting that the buyer belonged into a status group of "modern farmers." Similarly, by buying a car or appliances for the house, the farmer was not only achieving an end of material comfort. He was making also two symbolic statements: one statement concerning his fulfillment of a moral obligation *vis à vis* his own family (his wife "deserving" those appliances, as his children would "deserve" the school education they were getting); and another by means of which he was asserting his membership into the status group of the "modern" (or advanced) elements of the community, by contradistinction with those considered to be backward or traditional. And with 80% of these farmers having a car (and of these, 15% having two or more cars); 60% having a color television set; 98%, a refrigerator; and 90%, a washing-machine, it was clear for them, and for everybody else, that they belonged into that group.

Third, the understanding these farmers had of their occupation (partly) as a service, and not just as (only) an economic activity oriented towards an economic gain, was inspired less by a moral attachment to the land, than by a moral relationship between them and the rest of society. There has been little of a tradition of mystical respect or caring for the land, a

feeling more frequently found among urban literati than among rural dwellers. But farmers thought they provided a service by satisfying the needs of society for food, and in the final analysis, the needs of the whole world. At the same time, the theme of social service connects with that of farming as a vocation, as a call to carry out that service. When explaining their motives for choosing, or continuing in this occupation, values of self-realisation were insisted upon (44%) as well as the continuity of the family tradition (37%). But it is worthy of note that they rejected any pretention to reduce agriculture to just a social service, forgetting the economic interests. Rhetorical idealism did not fit into the realistic, pragmatic, literally down-to-earth approach of the farmers.

Fourth, there was also a tendency among these farmers to self-recruitment to farming, which may have some affinities with the practice of control on the entry into the professions. On surface, they look different, for the recruitment into professions is meritocratic, and recruitment in farming is basically contingent on the fact that candidates inherit to a family farm. There is some convergence, however between the two processes, to the extent that both may combine adscriptive and acquisitive considerations (family traditions having also some bearing in the actual process of entry into the professions); and to the extent that they both share an attempt to put that process under the profession's control. Self-recruitment into agriculture seems to be of the family type, adscribed and through inheritance in the farm, and not supposedly universalist, meritocratic, or acquisitive by means of examinations. This self-recruitment seemed high in this case, since 68% of the farmers had fathers who were farmers, therefore they had been socialised in the habits and cultural orientations implicit in traditions of land holding and cultivation of the land. At the same time, and here professions and farmers tend to converge, there was an ever increasing emphasis on a component of technical training and educational experience, which could operate almost as quasi-requisites for entry into the agricultural profession. In the case of the farmers, the combination of family tradition and the ability to adjust to modern conditions, as demonstrated by the mastery of new technologies and more formal education, fueled these farmers' tentative pressures on the state in order to

make sure that young farmers would have a preferential or privileged way of access to the land, to the detriment of nonfarmers.

Fifth, social service, as performed by the profession, is to be rewarded by honor, status or prestige. Professions have, as most occupations, a dual closure strategy<sup>43</sup> directed at groups placed in superior or equal positions, and at groups in inferior positions, and they use a redistributive ideology against the first, and a defensive ideology against the second. By contradistinction with occupational groups, professions carry on that complex strategy (a) normally through a professional or collegiate organization, which tries to press for and achieve privileges or special treatment from the state, and (b) normally by emphasizing the point, in the articulation of both its redistributive and defensive ideologies, that their claim to privilege is based on the social service they are providing for to society, and therefore on the honor, status or prestige due to them in return. Thus, usually, these professional associations do not limit themselves to getting economic benefits for their members, but they are all involved in the overall strategy of obtaining status and preserving the honor of their profession, and hence, logically, they hold themselves up to their members, and are frequently seen by them, as something more than an instrumental association. The value placed on the guarantee of honor, or status lead on to valuing, in turn, the association per se, as a community which reproduces and distributes prestige within the profession (which in turn implies social relationships among members and some feelings of identity with the association).

On this point, there was a clear affinity between professionals and farmers, since the farmers, like the professionals, leaned towards a state-corporatist control of the professional (and land) market, and in this way they tried to achieve both a redistribution of resources at the cost of competitors (such as food importers, agrobusinessmen, urban consumers), and a defense against rural workers and their trade unions. But there was also an affinity between them insofar as they considered their associations to have more than a merely instrumental character, farmers at least harboring mixed ambivalent feelings towards them. It may well be that only a substantial minority of these farmers belonged to professional associations (38%), but the main

reasons for these affiliates to be part of those organizations were not the selective benefits they expected for themselves. Most of them (58%) said they affiliated out of a sense of “necessity,” or moved by their identification with the organizations’ goals.

Sixth, it seems most farmers saw themselves as belonging to an undefined group of “middle classes” with blurred frontiers, though in fact they did not give overmuch importance to this question, at least as stated in terms of “classes” (their reading of social structure not being “classist,” not because they assumed classes did not exist, but rather because classes as such did not occupy a central position in their social lives and their understanding of their world). Their belonging to a middle class means that, when they try to ascertain the position they hold in society, they see themselves as occupying a middle ground, in the centre, close to where the majority stands. Two thirds of these farmers considered themselves as having as much as the majority of society had in relation to “available resources in general” (69%), and to the capacity for enjoying “whatever life has to offer” (66%) (and similar majorities expressed similar view concerning their access to more specific resources such as economic or educational ones).

Altogether, these farmers’ positive views of rural life, of their own achievements, and of their position in society boiled down to a high degree of rootedness and commitment to their profession as farmers. 70% said that they would not leave agriculture under any circumstances. They also expressed a strong will decided to continue investing in agriculture. This was reinforced by their rootedness in their villages, since 90% would not leave the village in which they lived. In fact, near three quarters of these farmers expressed satisfaction with the social climate, the recent developments, and even the local politics of their villages (78%; 72% and 79% respectively). This connection of the farmers with their villages has been traditionally greater than that of non farmers of them, as was demonstrated at the time of the great migrations of the sixties. (This is again corroborated by comparing their answers with those of a sample of rural dwellers in a survey undertaken by the FIES Foundation in 1981, where the number of people willing to leave their village was as high as 33%).<sup>44</sup>

Commitment to agriculture and the village came hand in hand with the high opinion these farmers had of themselves, agriculture, and the village culture of the time (which supposedly had already incorporated features of the modern life still missing in the sixties). Such high opinion suggests a change in their emotional climate (and to some extent of their villages), from a mood of self-criticism (in the 1970's) to a mood of self-assertion, as indicated by a revival of the village *fiestas* and regional sentiment.

Yet, this high degree of self-esteem contrasted sharply with what these farmers saw as the minimal recognition accorded to them by the rest of society, and by the state. This they resented deeply, and this formed the basis for a feeling of comparative grievance, and a critical attitude among farmers expressed through more specific criticisms referring to: (a) the lack of attention paid by government to agriculture as compared to industry and the service sector (89% of the farmers expressed this view in the ESA Survey of 1983); (b) the course of economic events, with what they considered to be a discrimination of agriculture, and its lack of progress compared to other sectors, partly as a result of that government neglect (81% shared this view); and (c) the low value society placed on farmers (91% of the farmers felt they were undervalued by society).

Thus, even after this tale of glory and success, of farmers' survival of the crisis of traditional rural life in the sixties and seventies, of adjusting themselves to modern conditions, of working out their complex economic, associative and political strategies of accommodation with advanced capitalism and liberal democracy, and even of finding new ways and new formulae for asserting themselves in such a new world, still these farmers kept on some basic traits of their ancestors when looking at the outside world. And they managed to feel neglected by the government, left behind by economic developments, and undervalued by society. So, their present-day view of their occupational and social identity as that of a professional seems to incorporate some traits of the traditional complexity of the Castilian ethos of *labrador honrado*, in that they put together an ideal of self-respect and social esteem based on a large degree of socioeconomic autonomy, with a sense of neighbourliness and social obligation, while at the same time they stick to the traditional pattern of ambivalence *vis à vis* the outside world, which

is compatible with a systematic attempt to come to better terms of understanding and accommodation with that world.

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